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S.C. DISMISSES PLEA TO STAY SALE OF ELECTORAL BONDS

The plea was moved by the Association for Democratic Reforms alleging lack of transparency in funding of political parties

'NO EVIDENCE OF ADVERSE IMPACT ON POLLS'

The NGO had claimed that the sale of electoral bonds before the Assembly elections would "increase illicit funding of political parties through shell companies". Dismissing the plea, a bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said there is no evidence that electoral bonds will adversely impact elections. The SC said fresh electoral bonds can be issued from April 1

TRANSACTIONS VIA BANKING CHANNELS

- "The purchase as well as encashment of the bonds, happening only through banking channels, is always reflected in documents that eventually come to the public domain," the order stated
- Donors can buy e-bonds from SBI and donate to political parties, which can encash them through their accounts within 15 days

₹1 crore IS THE HIGHEST DENOMINATION VALUE OF ELECTORAL BONDS

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'DIDN'T LET STUDENTS LOSE A YEAR'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Chennai

MUCH like everything else, the biggest education conclave, ThinkEdu, went virtual this year. Union Minister for Education Ramesh Pokhriyal, in his inaugural address, elaborated on his vision for the National Education Policy and the way ahead. He also spoke about how India was among the very few countries in the world that didn't let students' year go waste.

"Even when the rest of the world had foregone a year, India ensured that its students didn't waste it. Around 33 crore students were given education online. Provisions were made for those who couldn't come online through mediums like radio," said Pokhriyal.

TNIE Editorial Director Prabhu Chawla kicked off the ninth edition of ThinkEdu, saying: "This year, we have brought illuminating discussions and conversations about new ideas from India's finest thinkers — scientists, businessmen and storytellers."

In a different session, Subhash Kak was in conversation with Indic scholar Dushyanth Sridhar and senior journalist Kaveree Bamzai. Kak spoke about how he sifted through various layers of Sanskrit literature to find a lot of subjects, including astronomy, that had been lost for thousands of years. "It opened a whole new horizon to me," he said.

S Vaidhyasubramaniam, Vice-Chancellor, SASTRA Deemed-to-be University was in conversation with Makarand Paranjape, Director, Indian Institute of Advance Study, who spoke about Swami Vivekananda and AI replacing human teaching. "Swamiji is so important because he takes us beyond the idea of education being some sort of livelihood training."

FULL COVERAGE | P7

We successfully conducted JEE and NEET amid the pandemic, which are the country's largest competitive exams - Ramesh Pokhriyal, Union education minister

Mistry's ouster from Tata Sons kosher, says SC

Upholds group's decision to sack him as chairman; sets aside Dec 2019 NCLAT order

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

IN a huge win for Tata Sons, the Supreme Court on Friday ruled that the ouster of former Tata Sons executive chairman Cyrus Mistry was legal, setting aside a 2019 National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order that directed his reinstatement.

A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice S A Bobde said, "There was no oppression of the minority shareholder (Mistry). There was no mismanagement by Tata Sons."

The apex court, however, added it was open for Tata and Mistry to work out their terms of separation.

The court answered all the legal questions arising out of this dispute in favour of Tata Sons, bringing an end to one of the biggest corporate battles in recent times. "If someone, aggrieved after his removal from office can engage in shadow-boxing through the companies controlled by him, he cannot accuse the very same person who chose him as successor to be a shadow director. Someone who gained entry through the very same door, cannot condemn it when asked to exit," the 282-page judgment read.

Cyrus Mistry

Ratan Tata

Welcoming the verdict, Ratan Tata said the order validated the values and ethics that had always guided the Tata Group. "It is not an issue of winning or losing. After relentless attacks on my integrity and the ethical conduct of the group, the judgment upholding Tata Sons is a validation or the values and ethics that have always been the guiding principles of the group. It reinforces the fairness and justice displayed by our judiciary," he said in a statement.

The ruling came on a plea that challenged the December 18, 2019 NCLAT order which reinstated Shapoorji Pallonji Group scion Cyrus Mistry as the executive chairman of Tata Sons.

The Tata-Mistry dispute began when Mistry, who succeeded Ratan Tata in 2012, was ousted four years later.

'FAIR COMPENSATION' NOT ADJUDICATED

The bench refused to entertain Cyrus Pallonji Mistry's plea for fair compensation for his 18.5% stake in Tata Sons saying "the valuation of the shares of SP Group depends upon the value of the stake of Tata Sons in listed equities, unlisted equities, immovable assets etc... Therefore, we cannot adjudicate on the fair compensation" | P13

Firefighters attempt to douse a blaze at Dreams Mall, affecting patients admitted in the nearby Covid-19 dedicated Sunrise Hospital, in Mumbai, early on Friday | PTI

10 perish in Mumbai Covid hospital fire

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mumbai

AT least 10 coronavirus patients died and several others were injured in a major fire at Sunrise Hospital in Mumbai on Friday. The hospital is situated on the top floor of Dreams Mall at Mulund. According to the BMC, the blaze was noticed around midnight on Thursday on the first floor, and it quickly spread to the upper floors.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray visited the spot and ordered an inquiry. Thackeray apologised for the incident and said the guilty won't be spared.

"In view of the rising Covid-19 cases, permission was given to start new Covid treatment centres or hospitals in Mumbai. It seems there were lapses in fire safety," he said

Thackeray also announced ₹5 lakh as financial help to the families of the deceased.

Congress minister Aslam Sheikh said he was surprised to see a hospital inside the mall. "The Dreams Mall itself has not even got the occupation certificate (OC). Then how was the hospital set up inside the mall? Strict action will be taken against the guilty," he added.

Modi announces scholarship on Day 1 of Bangladesh visit

PUSHKAR BANAKAR @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Friday began his two-day trip to Bangladesh by hailing the contributions of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Indian armed forces in Bangladesh's war of liberation.

"Bangabandhu gave up his life for the people of Bangladesh. Today, on the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence and Bangabandhu's birth centenary celebrations, I remember and salute his contribution and the contributions of the Indian armed forces, *mukti jodhas* in Bangladesh's war of independence," Modi said at the National Day celebrations of Bangladesh in Dhaka.

Saying that India and Bangladesh's future together has a lot in store, he said it is important that New Delhi and Dhaka progress together. "The youth of both the countries need to be connected for better ties. I hence announce the setting up of *suvarna jayanti* scholarships for Bangladeshi students and also invite 50 entrepreneurs of Bangladesh to visit India," he said.

I announce the setting up of suvarna jayanti scholarships for Bangladeshi students and invite 50 entrepreneurs to visit India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Earlier, Modi presented the Gandhi Peace Prize 2020, awarded posthumously to Mujib, to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Modi also recalled how he had participated in Bangladesh's struggle for independence by holding a *satyagraha*.

Meanwhile, a protest by a mob against Modi's trip got violent, leaving four persons dead with bullet injuries. P9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi handing over the Gandhi Peace Prize conferred upon Mujibur Rahman, to his daughters Sheikh Rehana (L) and PM Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka on Friday

Ramesh Jarkiholi

FIR against Jarkiholi after woman files case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN a major twist to the sleaze CD row, the Cubbon Park police on Friday booked former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi for sexual harassment, based on a written complaint by the woman, who is believed to be seen in the video.

Jarkiholi has been charged under Sections 376C (sexual intercourse by person in authority), 354A (sexual harassment), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), 506 (criminal intimidation), 417 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and Section 67A (punishment for publishing or transmitting of material containing sexually explicit act, etc., in electronic form) of the Information Technology Act. All the sections invoked are non-bailable.

A senior police officer from the Special Investigation Team (SIT) said the First Information Report (FIR) has been registered and the case has been transferred to SIT. "We have issued a sixth notice to the woman through her lawyer who filed a case on her behalf, and she has to appear before the investigation officer to take further legal course," the officer said.

A few hours before the FIR was registered, the woman released a third video statement alleging that Ramesh Jarkiholi was behind the CD and that she would file a case against him, claiming to be a victim in the case. P4

EXPRESS READ

Bharat bandh: Roads blocked in Punjab

New Delhi/Chandigarh: Road and rail traffic was disrupted in several parts of Punjab and Haryana during the Bharat bandh called by farmers on Friday as part of their protest against the three laws, though there was partial response to it in other parts of the country. The Samkyukta Kisan Morcha claimed that shutdown was observed in many parts of the country. P10

President admitted to Army hospital

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind is undergoing check-up at the Army's Research and Referral hospital here after complaining of chest discomfort on Friday morning, the hospital said. "President of India visited Army Hospital (R&R) following chest discomfort this morning. He is undergoing routine check-up and is under observation," the hospital added.

WHERE THE STATES STAND

R-Naught reported in the country over a two-day period

AS ON MARCH 23

Maharashtra	1.59
Kerala	0.86
Karnataka	1.65
Andhra Pradesh	1.56
Tamil Nadu	1.44
Delhi	1.52
Uttar Pradesh	1.83
Bihar	1.68
Punjab	1.52
Telangana	1.39
Gujarat	1.61
NATIONAL	1.51

AS ON MARCH 24

Maharashtra	1.59
Chhattisgarh	1.98
Karnataka	1.66
Uttar Pradesh	1.90
Haryana	1.66
Delhi	1.60
Madhya Pradesh	1.63
Rajasthan	1.59
Andhra Pradesh	1.59
Punjab	1.53
NATIONAL	1.53

Source: covid19india.org

Covid infection rate higher in K'taka than national average

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

WITH the number of daily new Covid-19 cases increasing every day, the infection rate in Karnataka has edged past the national figure. The R-Naught (R-0) value, which represents the average number of people that a single infected person can transmit that disease to, stands at 1.66 for the state as of March 24, while the national figure is 1.53. The R-Naught value has crossed the 1 mark in 19 states across the country.

Epidemiologists and virologists now fear that second coronavirus surge could be worse than the first and stress that the government needs to pay immediate attention to containment measures. The case fatality rate too may see a rise because of the burden on the health care system with rising cases, they add.

Dr Giridhara Babu, Professor of Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India and member of the Covid Techincal Advisory Committee explained, "An R-0 of 1.65 means that for every 10 people infected, a further 16.5 will be infected by them. This is not a good situation to be in."

Experts say there are many reasons for this surge. While some point out that there have been significant changes in the virus itself, with data showing the growing presence of more infectious strains, others argue that people not following Covid-appropriate behaviour is the main reason.

However, renowned virologist Dr V Ravi, who is the nodal officer for genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 at NIMHANS, and is part of the international scientific advisory board for Russia's Sputnik vaccine, says the data available is not enough to say that the rise in cases is due to the "double mutation variant" and refers to a "variant of concern". Even a study, published recently by NIMHANS in the scientific journal MedRxiv, found four major SARS-CoV-2 variants circulating in Bengaluru. Of them, the B.1.36 variant has the highest prevalence, he pointed out. "The variant was seen in 45 per cent of the swab samples which NIMHANS subjected to genomic sequencing. The B.1.36 type cannot be called a variant yet, as its significance is yet to be studied," Dr Ravi, who spearheaded the study, said. P3

Gratuity should be paid in 30 days: HC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IT is not necessary that employers wait till an employee files an application for release of gratuity amount. It should be done immediately within 30 days after the cessation of a person's employment, the Karnataka High Court has ruled.

Referring to Section 7(2) of The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, the court noted that an employer is under obligation to settle the gratuity dues within 30 days of the end of service, whether or not an employee files an application. Justice Nagaprasanna also noted that interest should be paid if there be any delay in the payment.

DETAILS | P2

WRITER

ANIL DHARKER PASSES AWAY

The noted journalist and author died in Mumbai on Friday. He was 74. Over a five-decade-long career, Dharker was columnist, writer, architect, and a member of the advisory committee of film Censor Board.

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